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ABSTRACT

New programs taking a comprehensive approach to disadvantaged young men in urban areas have met with some success. This paper attempts to define the issues that will influence the development of comprehensive programs and examines the qualities that have made them a promising alternative for the future. Issues that shape the lives of youth include the following: (1) individual action versus environmental constraints as the root of economic failure; (2) assistance versus empowerment approaches to program development; (3) special problems of adolescence; (4) discrimination by race; (5) discrimination by class; (6) poverty; and (7) media messages. Principles governing successful programs include the following: (1) flexibility; (2) holistic rather than categorical approach; (3) community-based approach; (4) intervention aimed at institutions rather than individuals; and (5) early intervention. Successful programs have the following characteristics: (1) they address young people on a personal level through caring relationships with adults; (2) they provide a protective, family-like environment; and (3) they link youth to real opportunities within the community. Ingredients generally agreed upon as most needed for program success include the following: (1) individual attention; (2) neighborhood or community-based multiservice approach; (3) trained personnel; (4) social and personal skills training and counseling; (5) job skills training and placement; (6) parent involvement; and (7) peer involvement. A 50-item bibliography is appended. (AF)

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LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS IN YOUTH:

The Need for Comprehensive Programs for Disadvantaged Young Men in Urban Areas

A paper of the Forum on Public/Private Social Concern

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PREFACE

This paper, the second in a series of background reports prepared by the Forum on Public/Private Social Concern, examines ways to **create long-term investments in youth through the development of comprehensive programs for disadvantaged young men in urban areas.**

The first paper, *Structural Impediments to Success: A Look at Disadvantaged Young Men in Urban Areas*, set the context for the first year of the Forum, a new effort of the Union Institute Center for Public Policy, supported by the Ford and Kellogg Foundations. The earlier paper discusses the economic, social and demographic changes that have inhibited many young men from making a successful transition to adulthood.

The Forum hosts meetings to bring together government, foundation and business leaders, especially policy makers and funders, who are working to the goal of improving the quality and effectiveness of resources and programs dealing with domestic social issues. The Forum is designed to promote shared understandings of each social problem's overall context, key intervention points, and innovative program models, and enable participants to learn from each other and develop relationships that enrich individual decisions.

The Forum is guided by an Advisory Board of experts from each sector, supplemented by a Project Panel of experts on the annual topic. Their expertise, and willingness to share their time, ideas, and resources have helped strengthen this paper and the Forum as a whole.

This paper was written by Sarah Jones, Associate Coordinator of the Forum: Sarah's ability to work through contradictory findings and develop a coherent structure ensured that this paper would present its well-researched and analyzed case simply, clearly, and in a readable fashion.

Mark Rosenman
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December 1990

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LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS IN YOUTH

American society has created a myth of what it means to be successful: that success determines individual worth; that the individual is solely responsible for achieving success; that success is measured in terms of accumulated wealth and power; and that through hard work and ingenuity, anyone can become successful.

Disadvantaged young men in urban areas understand that driving expensive cars, wearing fine clothes, and sporting gold jewelry signify success. They strive to be successful and valued in this culture through whatever means possible.

The truth, however, is that **disadvantaged youth are denied the tools that make success attainable in the mainstream economy**. They need assistance in the form of housing, quality education and remedial tutoring, family counseling, sex education, adult relationships, medical care, recreation, safety, job training, and reasonable employment opportunities, to compete on equal terms for success in this society.

In the past, programs established to assist disadvantaged urban youth have been categorical and crisis-oriented. A program may have provided a young person with a condom or drug prevention classes, but did not offer him skills and employment opportunities as a reason for delaying parenthood or staying drug free. These programs did not invest in a youth as a whole person, but rather as someone manifesting a singular problem or pathology to be "fixed" or "cured" in a short period of time.

In contrast, new programs taking a comprehensive approach to disadvantaged young men have met with some success. These programs attempt to address root causes by taking a broad-based approach. However, these programs generally operate under highly individualized circumstances. They typically are run by charismatic leaders and committed staff with limitless vision, tenacity, sacrifice and love. Because of their size and often unique nature, these programs have neither the experience nor, in many cases, the inclination to establish themselves in a more business-like and institutional manner, assuring evaluation and replication.

Comprehensive programs, if they are to be *truly comprehensive*, must address several issues that shape the lives of youth. These issues are not new; they involve the debate over individual action v. environmental constraints as the root of economic failure and fixative v. empowerment approaches to program development, adolescence and the themes of racism, class distinctions, poverty, and media messages. In addition, successful comprehensive programs must be replicated on a much broader scale to reach a greater number of urban youth; yet, the nature of these programs makes them difficult to reproduce.

Information is beginning to emerge about what programs work. However, our understanding of these programs is incomplete. This paper attempts to define the issues that will influence development of comprehensive programs and examines the qualities that have made them a promising alternative for the future.

BIOLOGY V. ENVIRONMENT

Individualism is at the heart of this nation's economic construct. The American myth holds that whether one makes it or not in this society is ultimately based on his/her motivation and tenacity.

On the other hand, **research indicates that poor and minority youth face a series of structural obstacles that often preclude their success and which certainly place them at a disadvantage when competing for education, jobs and wealth.**

This is an age-old debate, but it sends a fundamental message to disadvantaged youth: who is to blame for the disparities that exist between them and more affluent youth? Are some youth falling behind and dropping out of school, becoming parents prematurely, becoming involved in deviant behavior, or attracted to the alternative economy because they are bad individuals of weak constitution? Or are there structural constraints at work, beyond their individual control, that limit their opportunities and place them at risk of not succeeding in the mainstream? Although this is a simplistic rendition of a complex set of issues, the way one answers this question sends a strong message to youth about whether they deserve supports and if so, whose responsibility it is to assist them.[1]

One solution to this dilemma comes from Mercer Sullivan's ethnographic research in three communities in New York City. He argues that individual actions and choices, whether to become involved in crime or whether to aspire to a prestigious business school, are tempered by one's social environment.[2] Individual actions and environmental constraints must be examined together when attempting to understand why some youth succeed and others fail.

ASSISTANCE V. EMPOWERMENT

Successful comprehensive programs do not view youth in isolation. They understand that young people are individuals first, part of a family second and lastly, members of a social community. Many of these programs provide services (remedial education, employment training, family counseling, health care, recreation, and

opportunities for work) on the assumption that structural barriers to success exist in many poor urban communities, and that youth and their families need assistance in negotiating around them. At the same time, they encourage, facilitate, and often times demand involvement by young people in the design and governance of the programs and in their own continuing development.

Youth Action Program (YAP), founded in 1978 in New York City, is one of the most impressive youth empowerment programs. "The basic premise of YAP is that youth can be a strong force for good in their communities. They have a clear perception of what is wrong in the world and vivid ideas for constructive change; they lack only the confidence and skills needed to carry them out."[3] YAP provides youth services, job training and education predominantly for black and Hispanic youth (ages 10-24) of East Harlem.

Over the last 12 years, more than 5,000 young people have helped to organize and implement community improvement projects through YAP. YAP programs include: a construction company made up of young people that renovates city-owned buildings in the community for low income and homeless families; student leadership projects in three high schools; creation of a recreation center and study center in a church basement; formation of a park from a run down lot; and under development, a local child-care center.

By **involving youth in every level of program governance, from staffing and budget decisions to program and policy initiatives,** YAP hopes to instill in the youth of East Harlem a sense of community, and the skills and confidence necessary to become productive members of society.

ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a period of preparation for and transition toward adulthood. During this growth phase, biological and cognitive maturity occurs, preparing youth to take on adult roles of reproduction, work and citizenship. In conjunction with this physical preparation, each society provides pathways, based upon its goals for adulthood, to facilitate youth's socialization.[4] The effectiveness of these structures determines whether the youth's transition is successful.

Before the turn of the century, adolescents were considered valuable members of society. They were given varied and meaningful opportunities for work and compensation under the guidance and protection of adult members of the community. "Adolescence was not a mixture of the childish and adult, it was a stage with a logic and definition of its own."[5]

Adolescence, in contemporary America, is an undervalued and trivialized period of development. As labor has become more abundant relative to opportunities for work, and jobs require more skill, adolescents have few vocational opportunities available to them. "The only meaningful role given to adolescents is as a student, and the only route toward successful adulthood is extended years of schooling."[6] The time between childhood and adulthood is so extended that many do not take on adult roles until their mid-twenties. Ironically, a young woman's menarche is, on average, at 12 1/2 years of age, and the average age a young man reaches puberty is 14. "This represents the greatest disparity between biological and social maturation in human history."[7]

Youth, especially those who are non-college bound, need routes to adulthood beyond schooling. The numbers of minority youth enrolling in college has declined significantly in recent years. According to Census statistics in 1986, 66% of white high

school graduates did not go on to college. In the same year, 71% of black and Hispanic high school graduates did not enroll in college.[8] In 1988, 12% of white youth (age 16-24), 15% of black youth and 36% of Hispanic youth had not graduated from high school and were not enrolled in school.[9] With the recent decline in manufacturing jobs that traditionally provided regular employment to non-college bound youth, this problem is being exacerbated. Therefore, **this culture offers no viable pathway to adulthood for a majority of its young.**

According to Laurence Steinberg, adolescence has become a "social and economic holding period."[10] **Youth are not given an active role in society, although they are physically capable and emotionally ready to begin taking on more adult roles.**

There is growing concern over the materialistic tendencies of today's young people. Being a consumer is one of the few adult roles available to this population. More research is needed in this area, but it appears that advertisers have capitalized on youth's boredom and desire to grow up. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent each year in advertising targeted at youth.

Many researchers are concerned that youth have less contact with adults, are segregated by age, yet have more autonomy than previous generations. Economic changes have made it necessary for both parents to enter the labor force. Divorce rates, rising numbers of woman having children out of wedlock, and few alternatives available for before- and after-school care have made it increasingly difficult for families and communities to provide the supervision to young people that was once available. As a result, youth are spending more time with their peers. Rolelessness and increased autonomy place many youth at risk of becoming involved in deviant behaviors. As Steinberg states, "**... adolescents today may find it easier to purchase illicit drugs than to obtain legitimate employment.**"[11]

A growing number of fully capable youth are forced to wallow for an inordinately long period of time in low-paying, low prestige positions until they reach adulthood. This sends a message to youth that they have no real value in society and that they probably are not going "to make it." Such a message of limited opportunity and diminished social worth places these young people in search of other activities to fill their needs and time.[12]

The National Crime Prevention Council has just completed a 2 1/2 year pilot project, **Youth as Resources (YAR)**, in three cities in Indiana to demonstrate that young people are a great resource for rebuilding their communities. Their philosophy is "If youth know that their community needs them, they will realize that they can be partners in solving some of society's most vexing problems and perceive that their responsible action will improve both the community's and their own situation."[13]

The goal of the project was to create a new perspective for communities and adults to view youth. Beginning in 1986, 150 projects were created involving 3000 young people. No one was excluded from participation: incarcerated youth and dropouts, as well as honor roll students and church youth groups, were active in YAR.

In each community, boards comprised of local young people and adults were established and given grant-making authority. Teams of youth and adults would develop and present their community improvement plan to the board for approval.

YAR has proven to be exceedingly successful. Communities benefitted from new playgrounds, picnic areas, aviaries, facilities for the homeless, and drug awareness programs for elementary schools, to name a few of the promoted programs. In addition, they learned the value of their youngest members. Currently, many of these

same youth sit on boards of community organizations and many of the projects developed by young people have found benefactors to sustain them.

Young people learned that they are needed in their communities and that they possess many worthwhile talents. Their participation improved their self-esteem, their visions, and their options for the future.

DISCRIMINATION BY RACE

Racism and discrimination continue to have a profound effect on the way youth perceive themselves and their opportunities for the future. Research confirms that as early as three years old, black children are aware of their subordinate position in this society.[14] Racism pervades the public school systems, the labor market, and the media.

It is well documented that teacher and parent expectations have a profound effect on student performance. **Many minority and poor youth who lack certain preparations for school and have different cultural and language backgrounds from their teachers, and are at great risk of being placed into low-ability groupings before they reach kindergarten.**[15] Thirty-five percent of Hispanic students are in vocational education tracks and 40% are in general education classes.[16] Minority youth are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs and overrepresented in educable mentally retarded groupings.[17] Minority youth need strong academic preparation and those who choose vocational programs must be assured state-of-the-art training.[18] Many youth remain in these low-ability tracks throughout secondary school.

Stark differences in the achievement levels of poor and minority children becomes evident by about the third or fourth grade. They are then tracked into further reme-

dial or special education programs. By the sixth or seventh grade the gulf between disadvantaged youth and other students can be as great as four grade levels. They become victims of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Based on this information, Jawanza Kunjufu conducted a study involving 20 young black men who had been in the same school for five years. He compared their national percentile ranking on the Iowa Reading Test at the beginning of their third grade year and at the end of the seventh grade. Youth that had scored at the 98th, 97th, 92nd, and 91st percentiles in the third grade had dropped to the 35th, 54th, 24th, and 68th percentiles, respectively, by the seventh grade.[19] Additional research is necessary to fully understand what is happening. Nonetheless, the study does suggest that, **as young men enter adolescence, something occurs that can not be accounted for on the basis of academic ability**.

John Ogbu believes, based on his ethnographic study of a community in northern California, that black youth reach a point in their education when they quit trying to compete for success in school. This is an unconscious adaptation to the limited opportunity to benefit from their education. He argues that blacks respond to "limited post school opportunity partly by reducing efforts in school tasks to the level of rewards they expected as future adults of American society."[20] Members of the community he studied continue to value education (as a means to get a good job and wages, not for its own sake) as much as those who are being well served by it. They just wish it would begin to pay off for them as it does for other members of society.

For those who continue on in school, the disparities among minority youth are later reflected in standardized tests that provide access to higher education and lead to better job opportunities. In this way, discrimination on the basis of race that begins in early childhood, affects the opportunities and aspirations of disadvantaged youth.

DISCRIMINATION BY CLASS

It is difficult to separate race and class when accounting for continuing inequities in American culture because disproportionate numbers of minority families are poor. However, William Julius Wilson and more recently, Benjamin DeMott, believe that class issues may be as much to blame for continuing inequities as race.[21] Failure to recognize this perpetuates group divisions and hatreds, and consequently, the status quo.

Research conducted by Franklin Frazier suggests that the conception of race and its effect on future aspirations and values varies by class. **Poor and middle-class black youth were more likely than affluent black youth to have experienced direct race discrimination.** Poor black youth reported feeling that white youth had a better chance of gaining employment. Middle-class black youth felt somewhat more optimistic about their future, but thought that their opportunities for employment were best when appealing to black employers or pursuing traditionally black career paths. Upper-class black youth were less likely to report that they came into direct contact with racist attitudes. Although aware of racism in the society-at-large, they felt confident about their future and that "competence and efficiency would be recognized whatever the color of the person possessing these qualities." [22]

Poor and predominantly minority communities tend to have inadequate school systems. Teachers, administrators, and facilities frequently are not of the quality found in more affluent districts.[23] Teachers and administrators who serve at-risk youth and who are not yet trained to be culturally sensitive can have a negative impact on those they intend to help. DeMott argues that public school teachers' understanding of the "ideal" student and the intelligent student is one who personifies middle- and upper-class behavior, aspirations, manners, dress and speech. "Schools everywhere take middle and upper class understandings of experience as its standard."[24]

Experiences of poor and working class families tend to value education as it relates to real life and work. **It is no wonder that impoverished youth have the highest dropout rates; as schools are currently designed, there is very little connection between school and work.**

In 1988 the New Jersey Department of Human Services developed a program, **New Jersey School Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP)**, to link the education and human services systems for young people (age 13-19) at risk of dropping out of school, becoming pregnant, abusing drugs, not being treated for mental illness, and being unemployed. Its philosophy is that if well-designed programs are available to youth in a convenient location and under one roof, "**they will use the services to help themselves become productive citizens.**"[25] SBYSP coordinates existing services, it does not create new ones.

Currently, there are 29 SBYSP sites in operation throughout the state, at least one in each county. All sites are located in or close to schools and offer a comprehensive range of services. Each site offers employment counseling, training and placement; drug, alcohol and family crisis counseling; tutoring; recreation; and referrals to health and social services.

In 1989, SBYSP served 19,000 youth (of a potential population of 60,000) who were eligible. Recently, Iowa and Kentucky have replicated the project. And in New Jersey, the program is expanding to serve the elementary and middle schools.

POVERTY

Currently, one in five youth is poor.[26] Poverty creates a web of barriers and limitations that for many is virtually impossible to overcome. It has been stated that envi-

ronment provides the framework for individual action and aspiration. **Youth growing up in an impoverished community often feel trapped by their circumstances: they can not envision opportunities beyond what is immediately available.** For many of these young men, crime and the alternative economy may be the most positive and rewarding options available.

Every American family must deal with issues of housing, child care, education, and medical care. But the family hampered by poverty has little or no control over these fundamental issues. Those with low wage jobs are more likely to work long hours with little flexibility. Consequently, they can not afford quality day care, if any at all; are unable to provide their children with the time and attention they require; and can not afford additional supports such as before and after-school activities.

These families frequently live in substandard, overcrowded housing and in unsafe neighborhoods. **Living with too little adult supervision, no positive recreational options, inadequate schools, and other problems of poverty, these youth do not attain the basic skills necessary for employment in a changing job market.** They are at profound risk of becoming involved in drugs, crime and other destructive behaviors.

Recently, as the majority of businesses have moved out of urban areas, opportunities for employment have diminished. The only growth in jobs for youth has been, and will continue to be, in the service sector. The vast majority of these job openings have been located in the suburbs. Disadvantaged urban youth have a difficult time commuting to these positions and frequently face discriminatory hiring practices when applying for them.

Research indicates that youth membership in gangs and organized crime "represents a last option, not a preferred one."[27] When positive alternatives to criminal activity are available, young urban men usually choose them.

When employment opportunities are limited, there is an increased risk of criminal activity. Such involvement certainly increases young men's chances of being arrested and developing criminal records. Once they have a criminal record, they find that opportunities for work in the regular economy are further diminished. Thus, the recidivism rate among urban young men is high.[28]

Thus, conditions of poverty have a cumulative effect on young people. It limits the way they perceive themselves and the heights they ultimately attain.

For many disadvantaged young people growing up in an impoverished community, the most effective program approach is to remove them from the pressures and constraints of their environment and expose them to a new one. This is the objective of a program administered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.), takes economically disadvantaged young people (ages 14-15) out of their community for 8 1/2 weeks in the summer and places them on a Texas public university campus for a "total immersion" work-study program. Since its inception in 1984, Y.O.U. has assisted more than 5000 young people. The program offers a wide range of support services including classroom instruction, tutoring sessions, counseling, health care, career planning, personal and social decision-making, study skills, recreational activities, and part-time employment on the campus.[29]

Last year the program was selected by the American Association of State College and Universities as one of 12 model dropout prevention programs across the nation.

Bridge Over Troubled Waters offers another innovative approach to serving high-risk, primarily homeless and runaway, youth. Bridge is a street-based multi-service youth agency for runaway and at-risk youth (ages 14-24). The program, founded in Boston, Massachusetts in 1970, serves an average of 4,000 young people annually.

Bridge offers counseling, a free medical-service van, dental services, academic tutoring, job skills training, a family life center for single mothers and their children, and housing. The philosophy of Bridge is to meet the immediate crisis needs of youth, through medical care, counseling, G.E.D. training, etc., and then to draw them into a more comprehensive range of services that will enable them to gain control of their lives.

MEDIA

When many people think of disadvantaged young men in urban areas, images of school drop-outs, gang violence, drug trafficking, crazy money, and murder over sneakers and leather jackets, come to mind. The media has sensationalized the extent of these problems to the point where the average American is scared of disadvantaged urban young men, most of whom are incorrectly assumed to be African-American.

What is the percentage of young men involved in gangs, making big money through the alternative economy, and killing each other over tennis shoes? The fact is, we do not know. There has been very little research in this area. Ethnographers have undertaken studies documenting the constraints on, and the attitudes and activities of

this population, but their work tends to center around a small number of youth in a particular community.[30]

Jawanza Kunjufu believes that **the media, and specifically television images, have a profound effect on attitudes and self-esteem**. Speaking primarily of African-American youth, he argues that as young people are beginning to feel alienated from school, and as the church in the black community is losing ground, television is becoming a primary transmitter of cultural values and attitudes.

This is particularly harmful for young black and Latino men. The "crisis" of the urban black young male has been the focus of a multitude of news reports and newspaper and magazine articles over the past year. The media have inundated the American public with negative images of these young men. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs believes that the stereotype of this population is best described by the "five d's: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed."[31] Latino young men are typically characterized as pimps and drug dealers.[32]

Research suggests that such harsh images of minority youth are shaping their understanding of what it means to be successful, regardless of their class background. According to Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu, the message among black youth is that trying to succeed (making good grades, aspiring to prestigious colleges and professions) is an expression of wanting to be white and contrary to what it means to be black.[33]

More research is needed in this area. It seems that **the widespread attention given to the actions of a small number of young inner-city black men is affecting how the majority of black youth view themselves and their futures**. This is a powerful and horrific example of how media messages affect self-esteem and aspiration.

Some believe that a crisis currently exists among black inner-city youth. The majority of inner-city black young men are poor, living in single-parent, female headed households with no positive adult male role models. Dropout rates are high. Gangs, violence and drug abuse are rampant.

What is needed, according to a growing number of people, is for successful black adult males to serve as role models and mentors for these young men. **Concerned Black Men, Inc. (CBM)** is a national organization with chapters in eight cities that teaches black men to become mentors, as well as to "sponsor a variety of programs and activities promoting educational, cultural and social development."[34] The Washington, DC-based CBM chapter, formed in 1982, provides programs such as: one-to-one mentoring; Project Northstar, a tutoring program in which successful adults are paired, one night a week, with homeless youth in a group setting; and Project 2000, in which black males become teaching assistants in inner-city elementary schools.

Another approach to serving high-risk young men is through a male-only comprehensive program. Developed in 1981 by the Mecklenburg County Health Department, **The Males Place**, is a "male family planning program designed to help teenage and young adult males achieve and maintain responsible sexual behavior and understand their role in the prevention of adolescent parenthood."[35] The Males Place operates in Charlotte, North Carolina and provides education, counseling and medical services to young men ages 15 to 24. The program provides recreational activities such as basketball, rap contests and disco to attract participants.

The program also provides sex education workshops throughout the community. It is estimated that The Males Place serves 325 - 400 young men annually through its medical clinic and another 8,000 - 12,000 through its community outreach program.

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMS

Because issues affecting disadvantaged young men in urban areas are interconnected, comprehensive programs offer the best approaches for assisting them. Although the most successful comprehensive programs vary from one community to the next, they embody a common set of principles and characteristics. These qualities are replicable and offer a glimmer of hope that one day all youth will have access to an array of supports whenever they are necessary. As Lisbeth Schorr states, in her seminal work, *Within Our Reach*:

> Model programs - no matter how special their circumstances - bring home that, even in an imperfect world, something can be done to address certain seemingly intractable social problems. They provide a vision of what can be achieved, a benchmark for judging other efforts, and - at a minimum - a takeoff point in the search for better understanding of the elements of interventions worthy of widespread implementation.[36]

While programs cannot be stamped out with a cookie cutter, following is a *list of principles* that govern successful programs, as developed by author/researcher Joy Dryfoos:[37]

- There is no single program that is the most effective and should be replicated for all youth. Programs need to be flexible to respond to the needs of their clients and the community.
- Problems are interrelated and programs should be comprehensive and holistic, rather than categorical in nature.
- Programs must be community-based.
- Interventions should attempt to change institutions rather than individuals.
- Interventions must start early before problem behaviors have become ingrained.

- Supports, services and relationships must be sustained over a long period of time. "One shot" efforts do not work.

The most *commonly agreed upon characteristics* for successful programs include that:

- they address young people on a personal level through caring relationships with adults;
- they provide a protective, family-like environment;
- they link youth to real opportunities within the community.

These elements are commonly held to be "a precondition for healthy individual development and a major lack in the lives of the young people served."[38] In addition, programs must be allowed to be flexible and creative.

There seems to be *broad agreement on the programmatic ingredients* most needed for programs to be successful:[39]

- Individual attention.
- Neighborhood or community based multi-service approach.
- Trained personnel.
- Social and personal skills training and counseling - Developing coping and resisting strategies against negative peer pressure; learning to make constructive choices about the future.
- Job skills training and placement - Providing basic skills training, specific job related skills, exposure to the world of work, money for participation, and/or opportunities for summer and full-time employment opportunities.

- Parental involvement - Visiting youth's home to talk with parents or soliciting the help of parents in the running or support of the program.

- Peer involvement - This may work through an arrangement of peer support groups or using older youths as instructors, tutors or mentors for younger youth.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Discussed below are several areas in which the programmatic research is not consistent or where program results have been conflicting.

1) There is ongoing debate among service providers and youth policy makers about whether programs should focus on *prevention strategies for younger populations or intervention strategies for older youth*. The general consensus seems to be that prevention strategies are more effective that intervention programs. In addition, assisting older youth is more time and labor intensive. Nonetheless, intervention programs for 15-24 year olds are much more enduring and cost-effective than the alternatives of joblessness and prison. The average cost per-youth of a prevention/intervention program is one-half that of prison for a residential program and even less for a non-residential program.[40]

2) Confusion exists over the factors that signify a successful transition to adulthood and exactly *what is meant by the term "at-risk."* Recently, the Search Institute published a report, "The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth," a survey of youth in public schools in 111 communities, across 25 states, to evaluate the current state of youth welfare. They established criteria of 20 at-risk behaviors to systematically determine who is at-risk and what should be involved in assisting them. If we are committed to understanding the supports at-risk youth need, then it

is necessary to formulate a working definition of the term and to determine the number and characteristics of youth who need assistance.

3) A series of questions arise regarding the merit of using *volunteers*. Many programs rely on volunteers. Throughout the 1980's, resources allocated to human service programs were cut. For many of these programs, the use of volunteers has become essential. Currently, there is renewed interest in volunteerism as a way to get youth involved in their communities and to activate the talents and resources of older members of society. In addition, there is growing interest in the possibilities of mentoring as a relatively inexpensive answer to issues confronting at-risk youth.

Experiences of the Eisenhower Foundation during the past ten years conclude that "reliance on voluntarism is no substitute for adequately resourced programs and adequately rewarded and trained staff."[41] Furthermore, in communities most affected by crime, drug abuse and youthful alienation, volunteers can face serious risks and youth frequently require the attention and skill of highly trained personnel, with more professional acumen than volunteers are able to provide.[42]

4) Questions arise over whether to *target high-risk youth* for assistance. According to Dryfoos, there is an understanding among youth policy makers that funds to assist young people are limited. Therefore, should resources be allocated for those most at-risk or should they be used for the benefit of all youth, as in overhauling a failing public education system.[43] Another area of concern is that labeling certain youth as disadvantaged or at-risk may be harmful to their self-esteem and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dryfoos points to tracking as an example of what can happen when youth are classified. It negatively affects learning and lowers self-esteem for all but the highest achievers.[44]

Dryfoos concedes that there is no consensus on these issues but, "the majority of those concerned with high-risk youth seem to take the position that resources should be targeted on high-risk neighborhoods and school districts, but not on specific high-risk children."[45]

5) Is it necessary to *design programs specifically for different ethnic and racial groups?* Reverend Gary Reirson, Executive Director of The Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches (GMCC), argues that cultural awareness among those working with youth is vital but does not believe different programs need to be designed for different groups of youth.[46] For example, in order to provide support for Native American women who have been abused by their partners, GMCC has adapted its program, with great success, to incorporate men into the counseling process. GMCC has found that flexibility and sensitivity toward cultural difference is essential for program success.

6) Do *adult mentors need to be the same sex and race or ethnicity as the young male*? Much of this concern has evolved out of a belief that inner-city young black men lack adult male role models in their communities. Some argue that such relationships are absolutely necessary, others hold that while it is preferable, the primary concern is that all disadvantaged youth have at least one caring adult relationship in their life.[47]

7) The last area for concern is *program evaluation.* Evaluations are vital for determining the outcomes of a particular program, for providing data to increase our understanding about at-risk youth, and for replication of effective programs. Yet evaluations can be expensive, often require burdensome reporting methodology, and stretch scarce resources even farther.

CONCLUSION

We, as a nation, must transform our thinking about youth. **We need to stop thinking in terms of problems and trying to respond to crises, and begin to make life-long investments in youth development.** Youth want to become meaningfully involved in this society and our nation needs them now and as future adults. The programs cited above offer tangible examples of the benefits that derive from activating the resources and talents of young people.

While research is incomplete and there is much that is not known about how most effectively to work with youth, experience has given us an overview of successful programs. **We must act now to put these principles to work, so we do not lose this generation of young men.**

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